

Adaptive, Responsive, and Speedy Acquisitions

Gen. David H. Petraeus, Commander, U.S. Central Command



The enemy that the United States is fighting is unlike any enemy fought in the past, demonstrating different tactics, techniques, and procedures from those found in conventional warfare. To respond to that enemy, there is a greater need for speed, agility, and responsiveness. When a servicemember in Iraq or Afghanistan needs a tool or a service or a weapon, he or she needs it right away. The shift from conventional warfare to asymmetric warfare and overseas contingency operation changes the way the acquisition community provides its services to the warfighter. Gen. David H. Petraeus, commander, U.S. Central Command, discussed the requirements of the warfighters in the CENTCOM area of responsibility in an interview conducted by Frank Anderson, president, Defense Acquisition University. A video of the interview can be seen on the DAU Web site at <www.dau.mil>.

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Gen. Petraeus, I want to start off by thanking you for taking time out of your schedule to participate in this interview with us. In this first warfighter acquisition leadership interview, I would like to salute you as the U.S. CENTCOM commander. Also, on behalf of Dr. Ashton Carter, the under secretary of defense for acquisition, technology and logistics, I want to thank all of the soldiers, sailors, airmen, Marines, coastguardsmen, and civilians who are operating in harm's way to support our national security objectives and, more specifically, the counterinsurgency operation in your area of responsibility, especially Iraq and Afghanistan.

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Well, it's great to be with you, Frank. It's a privilege. We have some important messages for some key people that I think we can get across during this interview, and again, I'm delighted to be with you.

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In going through your background, I recognize that you really are viewed as the father of our current doctrine for counterinsurgency. That was developed under your leadership when you were the commander of the Combined Arms Center at Fort Leavenworth, Ky.

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Well, it was a big team effort, and we had a huge number of contributors. We were very privileged to have a good team, and a couple of us, I guess, were perhaps setting the cadence for that team.

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Yes, sir. What we'd like to do, through a series of questions here today, is to capture some of your lessons learned that we can transfer to our learning assets that will be used to prepare the acquisition workforce for counterinsurgency operations. So we will do this interview in two parts: First, we'll focus on acquisition support of counterinsurgency operation, and then, we'll get some of your thoughts and ideas about the role of leadership in our long-term success. I would like to start out with the first question: How has the paradigm shift, from a mindset of conventional warfare to asymmetric warfare and overseas contingency operation, impacted the delivery of products and services the acquisition community provides in your theater of operation?

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Well, I think it has impacted in a couple of important ways. First of all, of course, with irregular warfare, we're literally facing different types of threats—different enemies who employ different tactics, techniques, and procedures. So rather than having tank-on-tank or large formations against other large formations, as in conventional warfare (the type that many of us prepared for much of our careers), we're up against individuals who come at you in an asymmetric fashion—using improvised explosive devices, indirect fire,

and so forth; and they'll occasionally come out in some numbers and try to take our forces on directly, but more often than not, they have an indirect approach. And so, first of all, we have to recognize the nature of the threat—how it has changed—and having done that, we obviously have to provide our soldiers, sailors, airmen, Marines, and coastguardsmen the tools that are necessary to counter those particular threats. Second, we have to recognize that this is an enemy that adapts very rapidly: It's flexible; it is a learning enemy. It may be barbaric, it may employ extremist ideologies and indiscriminate violence and oppressive practices; but this is an enemy that learns and adjusts and adapts to what we do. So we have to, therefore, speed our processes. We can't use the traditional peacetime acquisition processes that some of us in the Army remember—the Abrams tank, and the Apache, and the Bradley, and so forth. We produced those after decades of development, test, acquisition, and all the rest of that. In this case, we see a threat, and we have to respond to it very rapidly, which means that all of our processes have to be much more rapid and much more responsive to meet the needs of those who are down range, putting it all on the line for our country.

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You seem to put a lot of emphasis on adaptability, speed, and responsiveness to a learning enemy that is very adaptable and agile in change. How critical is that?

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It's crucial. Again, that is the enemy we face and also, by the way, these are the qualities that we need in our own leaders and troopers. In fact, we emphasize a great deal on having flexible, adaptable leaders who can recognize the changes that are taking place in their particular areas of responsibility and who can perform nontraditional tasks in the stability and support range. That's the kind of leader, that's the kind of trooper we need; and we need the processes that can enable them with what it is that is required to deal with the challenges they have in their particular areas.

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One of the big contributors from the acquisition community and counterinsurgency operations are contracting officers. What do you see as the major contributions of our contingency contracting officers operating in a counterinsurgency zone?

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Well, they play very important roles. In fact, so important that when I was asked to go back to Iraq for a second tour after a very short time back here in the United States—which, in fact, even included a trip back to Iraq to do an assessment for several weeks of the Iraqi Security Forces—but when I was sent back to stand up the so-called “Train and Equip Mission,” I asked the deputy secretary of defense for six contracting officers. I said, “I just can't envision being able to accomplish the mission that is established for us without having those individuals, and I know we're going to

need them right up front. So let's just go ahead and put the demand on the system," I told him, because what I intended to do was to have one of those in each of the six divisional areas in Iraq so that we could rapidly start developing the infrastructure and other construction programs that were necessary to support the effort we now know as the Multi-National Security Transition Command-Iraq. Indeed, we did hundreds of millions of dollars of contingency contract officer-contracted activities across the board—not just construction but also contracting for services, supplies, and the like. And again, their responsiveness, their ability to focus on what we needed in local areas and to get that job done very rapidly proved to be of enormous importance.

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Now-retired Maj. Gen. Darryl Scott [deputy commander, Task Force to Support Business and Stability Operations in Iraq, Office of the Deputy Under Secretary of Defense for Business Transformation; and deputy director, Defense Business Transformation Agency] is a very close friend of mine who actively supported you, and we've talked about a facts-based contract and how important that was to economic stability. Would you comment on that, sir?

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Well first of all, he did a great job at the helm of what was called the Joint Contracting Command Iraq/Afghanistan, and that was a concept that we implemented over time as we basically established all of the structures that were necessary across the board in the Multi-National Force-Iraq;

and again, he did a great job leading the civilian as well as military contracting community that was part of that command in Iraq. What we were trying to do there was not just to satisfy the demands that we had for services, supplies, construction, you name it—whatever is contracted out—and to do it legally and absolutely, completely transparently above-board with lots of audits and all the rest. We also sought to do it in a way that could provide as many benefits to the Iraqi people as was possible. We sought to increase the number of Iraqi contractors after that number had gone down quite a bit because of concerns over their reliability. You know, when you have your mess hall blown up by someone masquerading as an Iraqi soldier—or whatever—there is a degree of understandable mistrust that is built in. And so first, we worked to get the Iraqis back inside with appropriate safeguards, searches, counterintelligence, and so forth. Then, the second was, let's do an Iraqi-first contracting concept. That was the big idea; let's help the Iraqis reestablish transportation networks. The Iraqi transportation network now is all over the country. It started with just a couple of companies ... actually, tribes. They were very important to rebuilding the infrastructure and the organizational structures within Iraq that could, over time, take over the responsibility for tasks that we were using Western contractors to perform. Really, the Iraqis had the capability; they had the human capital; they had the knowledge, the know-how. We just needed to give them the chance and, occasionally, we had to do a little bit of mentoring or advising when it came to business practices and so forth, but that has, I think, by and large been a success. It has helped inject into the Iraqi economy a substantial amount of money that has therefore helped to give them a bit of a peace dividend, if you will, as the level of violence has come down very substantially in the wake of the Sectarian Violence of 2006-7. That has shown them that there are rewards out there when peace starts to break out. Again, I don't want to make light of the continuing security challenges in Iraq by any means because they are still very much there. But by comparison, they are vastly reduced, and they are at a level that permits commerce and construction and business to go forward.



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As I reviewed the field manual on counterinsurgency, one of the things that became very clear to me is that you need people in the theater who are in a continuous mode of learning, particularly as they move out to different locations

because the circumstances in one location are not necessarily what you will find in another. So the acquisition folks have to come in and be very adaptable to the conditions in different locations within the same area of operation. Would you comment about that, the requirement for adaptability?

A Sure. Well, I think it's true, as I mentioned earlier, of everybody who's operating in a regular warfare context, the conduct of counterinsurgency operations puts a premium on those who can learn faster than others, frankly. There's actually a comment in there that he who learns fastest ends up making progress and wins in the end in these kinds of struggles. And that is very true, and it is true also of all of those who are operating in local areas and have to appreciate the circumstances in a very nuanced fashion of those particular locales: the culture, the traditions, how the systems are supposed to work, how they really work, tribal networks, social organizing structures, local businesses who are the power brokers, all the rest of that—that has to be understood very clearly in quite a nuanced and granular fashion, because if you don't, you can end up contracting with folks who could be part of the insurgency. You could undercut the people that you are trying to support. Again, there are a whole host of challenges that have to be confronted by individuals who are working in counterinsurgency environments, and the challenges extend to those in the acquisition and contracting community as well.

Q We've talked about contingency contracting officers. Would you share some of your thoughts on expectations for program managers who are delivering systems to support your area of operation?

A Well, I think first of all, program managers have to understand the circumstances as well, and they have to have a sense of what is going on out there; that can only be achieved by going out there themselves, by talking to those who have spent a considerable amount of time out there, and by trying to develop lessons that mean something to them—to put into the hands of our troopers what it is that they need in these tough fights. So, they've got to understand irregular warfare, and they have to understand it in specific circumstances where we are carrying out operations. I think that's number one. Number two is never lose sight of who the ultimate customer is or the importance of providing that customer what he or she needs. And then, number three, never, ever underestimate how important speed is. We need what we need now. As a threat emerges, we need to counter it rapidly. We constantly see emerging issues that have to be addressed, and they have to be addressed rapidly. Again, this is not a peacetime endeavor; this is a wartime endeavor, and it has to have that degree of commitment—of persistence to battle the bureaucracy, to battle processes—to push through

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all those different requirements that might prevent the rapid provision of what our soldiers need.

Q To take that to a little different level, I think what I'm hearing from you is that in many cases, you're better off getting an 80-percent solution today that you can use now instead of waiting months or another year to get a 100-percent solution.

A That's very true. We're willing to test a solution as long as it is not something that is going to jeopardize the safety or lives of our troopers, we're happy to just have it come out there and let us try it. We had all kinds of one-offs, frankly, that were sent out to our troopers in Iraq, and I was fine with it. You really have different paradigms. Every one of these little bases, for example, every small patrol base or forward operating base needing station property, of all things, we would call it in the United States. Yet you don't have station property on a TOE [Table of Organization and Equipment], so we just went

out and bought stuff and said we'll see how these things work and our troopers can figure out how to operate them. And you know, if they were useful and helpful, they used them; if not, they parked them in the corner of the patrol base, and we got on with business. But that's the kind of attitude I think that you have to have, again, assuming that it's not going to jeopardize the safety or well-being of our troopers in that process.

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As we look at preparing people to move into theater—replacement individuals who are coming in—what advice would you provide for acquisition members who are taking a new assignment or coming in country to replace someone who's there? How do we prepare them so that they can be successful?

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Well, I think first of all, you can virtually look over the shoulder of those who are down range. You can get on the Internet—secure Internet—and you can have lots of good discussion, you can have virtual communities, and these all exist in which there can be lots of batting around of ideas and, again, debates and discussions and so forth about what is needed, how best to meet those needs, how to negotiate the bureaucracies and the processes and the systems and so forth, and also how to understand them. So again, I think someone who's preparing to come out has to go through sort of a road-to-deployment process just as do our units. You know, our units ideally have a year; we start off with a counterinsurgency seminar for a week, and then they start down the road to deployment. Along the way, they have other seminars; they have lots of exercises. They have individual leader and collective and staff training along the way, and ultimately, they put it all together in a mission rehearsal exercise at one of our combat training centers. So frankly, we need to have similar processes to that as much as we can, recognizing that this is probably more about individuals than it is about even small units. But, with that caveat, there has to be this sense of a road to deployment and of preparation. Beyond that, I think it's hugely important to try to understand the circumstances in which what acquisition officers provide is going to be used. That means sort of understanding the irregular warfare battlefield, the areas of operation, local circumstances in different places, recognizing that what works up in regional command east of Afghanistan may not be so suited for regional command south and vice versa. What worked in Iraq won't necessarily be ideal, as we've seen with the MRAP [Mine Resistant Ambush Protected] vehicles—they're very large, quite heavy and wide, and they're terrific in Iraq; they saved countless lives there, but they're too large for the roads in many places in Afghanistan. And so the acquisition community is coming up with the so-called all-terrain MRAP vehicle. And I want to put in a plug for our under secretary of defense, Ashton Carter, because I surfaced an issue with him about the new all-terrain MRAP vehicle. The next day, he went out to Aberdeen Proving Ground, I think it was. They lined up all the MRAP vehicles, he drove them for himself, he agreed with the issues that we had surfaced, and on the spot, he directed changes be made. That's the kind of approach

we need. The issues had to do with the size of the windows, of all things, and the lack of sufficient visibility out of the new all-terrain MRAPs in an effort to save weight because of the weight of the ballistic glass, and so there has been an adjustment made as a result. There have been some other changes also. That's the kind of rapid acquisition, the rapid processes, the decision making that has to take place. We didn't convene a committee, we didn't have large meetings—we didn't have to do all those other things. Some of these issues you can see are pretty straightforward and you don't need to go through a lengthy process to direct changes. Dr. Carter didn't, and that sets a wonderful example for the entire community.

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As I listen to you, there is a clear emphasis and perspective on speed, agility, and delivering the equipment now.

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Yes, well there is. Remember that I am one of six geographic combatant commanders. The world's divided up into these six regions, and we're the ones who are concerned with the region's most pressing near-term needs, so you have to balance our input, of course, with that of, say, a service chief who might be looking a bit farther out. That's the buyer beware label on the input that I'm providing here because I do recognize that there is, without question, still the need for the longer processes that result in the major programs out there that require the traditional steps in acquisition, compared with, say, the very rapid acquisition of some of the items that we've been able to field in very short periods of time to Iraq, Afghanistan, and elsewhere.

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I was reading an article over the weekend about Secretary of Defense Robert Gates, and it indicated that one of his big priorities and concerns is getting the right balance between the focus on fighting the current war—developing and delivering the equipment for the current fight—and the focus on fighting the future of the next war. And he's going back through as a part of his acquisition reform initiative to drive a better balance between the two, and I think that certainly would fit your comments here today.

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Well, very much so, and I think that he's had this kind of input. I know he's had it from me in two different positions now, and I know he's had it from others of the geographic combatant commanders in particular. You have to prepare for the future; you have to devote a certain amount to the future. But you also have to win the wars you're in, and that means a focus on rapid acquisition—the quick response to the needs of our troopers. And Secretary Gates has done that. I can assure you that when we established the need for more unmanned aerial vehicles much more rapidly than they were going to be procured, he pushed and the system responded. When we identified the need for a V-shaped hull, which is now called the MRAP vehicle—and frankly, we could have had it sooner,

in my view. There were many of us who came home from second tours in Iraq and said, "We think it's time to do that." We were procuring them for the Iraqi military, and we identified shortcomings with the up-armored Humvee. But it took a while, again, understandably—this was still when these processes were in the period of adapting more rapidly, and then to their credit, the Services brought it all together. But certainly Secretary Gates' direction was a key catalyst and a pretty key factor in production of the MRAP vehicle, I can tell you.

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You have talked about some of the support that you've received from the acquisition community in terms of weapon systems. Are there any other specific examples?

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Well, there are plenty of them. I think you go all the way back to the beginning—I mean you start with the individual soldier kit. The fact is that our soldiers used to spend hundreds of dollars—if not thousands of dollars in some cases—going to various military equipment stores right out the front gate, buying stuff that probably our military should have bought for them. And over time the military has, and it did it really quite quickly. Then, of course, there's the response to the counter improvised explosive device effort and the whole JIEDDO [Joint IED Defeat Organization] process. And again, pushing the very rapid response of industry in the acquisition community to get into the hands of our soldiers jammers, vehicles that can be used to probe for IEDs, and all the rest of this. Very, very important, and then it just keeps going all the way on up throughout the system; and then you have the services coming in and saying, "Geez, you know, if we put this pod on the F-16 or on this platform ... Let's see what we can do." And it just keeps going. And I think at a certain point, all of a sudden, this whole attitude, if you will, reached critical mass, and we had a chain reaction. And you had a situation where everyone was saying: "How can I help more rapidly? How can we identify the needs and immediately answer them? How can we again put into the hands of our troopers on the battlefield the tools that they need to deal with the threats they face?"

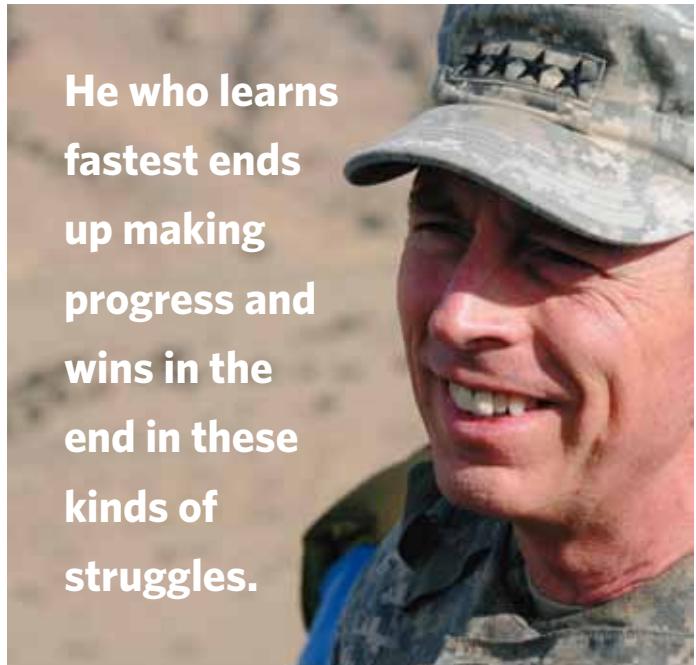
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Now I'm going to make a transition to a topic that I know is very, very important to you. I'd like to spend some time talking to you about leadership. But before we make that shift, would you take a couple of minutes and define your area of responsibility so that all of the people will understand the perspective that you bring from your personal experiences and the challenges in the U.S. Central Command area of responsibility—why it's critical that we get better at supporting?

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Well, Central Command, first of all, is actually the smallest of the six geographic combatant command areas, but it has the lion's share of the problems, unfortunately. It is a region that stretches from Egypt in the west to Pakistan in the east,

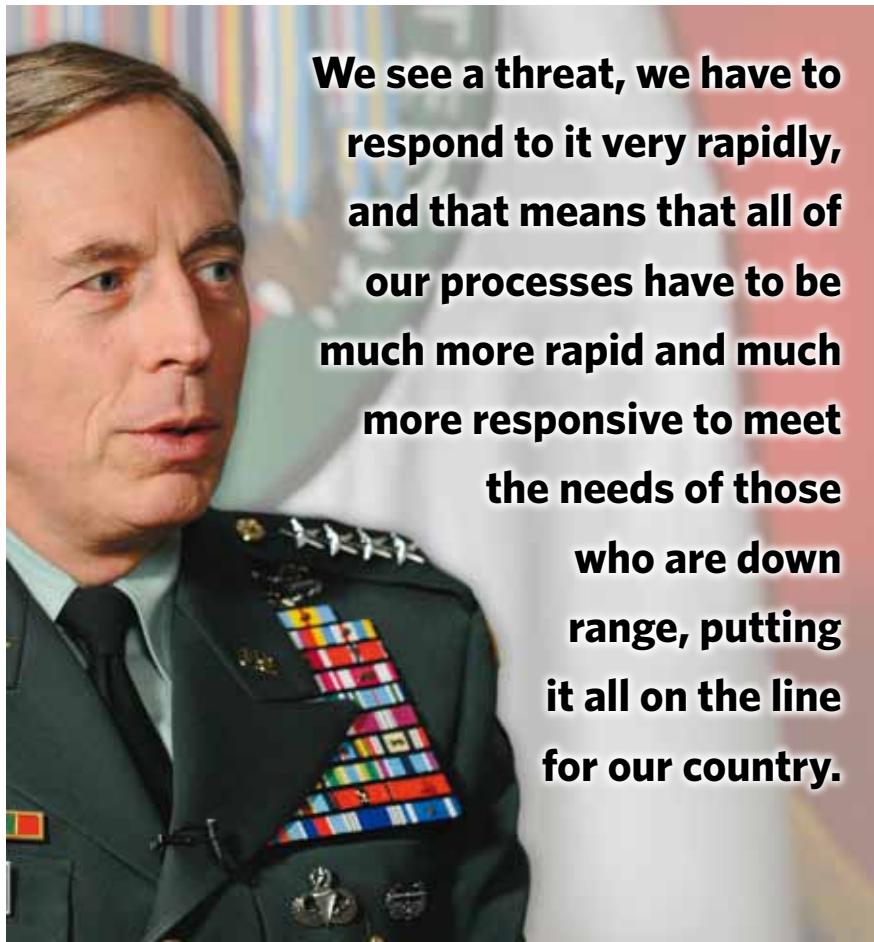
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Kazakhstan in the north and then the waters off Somalia in the south; 20 countries all together, and well over 500 million people with all kinds of challenges and difficulties. It has the richest of the rich—a country with the highest per capita income in the world—and it has some of the poorest of the poor. It's a region of contrast; it's a region of friction between religious groups, ethnic groups, different sects ... even within different religions. It has unmet needs. It has everything from Al Qaeda and other transnational extremists and terrorist groups to Shia militants sponsored by Iran. It has the threat of proliferation of weapons of mass destruction mostly in Iran. It has, of course, the efforts, the wars, counterinsurgency operations in Iraq and Afghanistan, and the major support that we're providing in Pakistan as well. It has pirates; we're into counterpiracy. It has arms smugglers, illegal narcotics, industry kingpins, you name it and we have it. And we're privileged to have over 230,000 great soldiers, sailors, airmen, Marines, and coastguardsmen; tens of thousands of additional DoD civilians, and then hundreds of thousands of contractors of various skill sets. So it is a hugely important region to our country because of all that, and then you add in the fact that it has something like 60 percent of the world's proven oil resources and well over 40 percent of the world's proven natural gas resources. A very important region to our country, an area in which we're focusing an enormous amount of our most important resources, foremost among them are great young men and women who, I do believe, are the new greatest generation of Americans. It's also an area into which we are putting considerable treasure, needless to say, in terms of the sheer amount of money required to fund the operations in Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan, among others.

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As you describe your very broad area of responsibility, it's obvious that you can't oversee and do everything yourself, so



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leadership and the development of leaders are critical to your success. Would you describe some of the key leadership skills and your approach to mentoring your subordinate leaders?

AFirst of all, I probably should've pointed out as well that I've been in the Central Command area of responsibility almost nonstop now since we went into Iraq in March of 2003—or flew over it in the case of the 101st Airborne Division Air Assault. And I commanded the division there, then the Train and Equip Mission, then Multi-National Force-Iraq, and now Central Command Headquarters.

I sat down early on and said, "Well gee, what should our headquarters do and what should I try to do?" I think it's important to recognize that leaders—really at all levels, but particularly at strategic levels in larger organizations—have these issues of very significant command structures. I think that we have four big responsibilities. The first is to get the big ideas right; to get the overall concepts correct. The second is to communicate those big ideas throughout the breadth and depth of your organizations; not just to your subordinate leaders and their subordinates, but to have them echoed and reechoed all the way down through all of the elements that you're privileged to oversee. Third, you have to oversee the implementation of the big ideas, so you've got to get out there. You have to be on the ground; you have to sit

through endless campaign assessments, and they're hugely important. You have to talk to everyone from private soldiers on up to the four star subordinates that we have in the Central Command area of responsibility. You have to talk to locals; you have to talk to governments. Of course, we try to do everything with partners, not just partners from the region, but the partners from outside the region who are active in it, too. By the way, we have 60 countries represented by senior national representatives at CENTCOM headquarters alone. It's like a mini-United Nations. So, you develop the big ideas and get them as right as you can—and by the way, big ideas don't hit you in the head like Newton's apple when you're sitting under a tree. More likely, you get a little seed, and that builds, and you slap another tiny idea on it. And you keep forming it, shaping it, modifying it, refining it, trying it out, throwing it against the wall; intellectually having people challenge it, having strategic assessments and all the rest, and gradually, the big ideas start to come together. So we've got the big ideas, we've communicated them as effectively as we can, we're overseeing their imple-

mentation, and then the last task is to identify best practices; identify lessons that can be learned only by incorporating them into the big ideas that have to be communicated and over which you have to see the implementation.

So all of this—these four tasks—I think are the key really to leadership in any organization. And you have to spend a heck of a lot of time up front, trying to get those big ideas right. When we did the surge in Iraq, for example, the surge was not just 30,000 more U.S. forces or 125,000 more Iraqi forces that were added to the rolls during that time. The surge really was about the employment of those forces and all of them. It was about changing the focus of all of our forces together, all coalition and Iraqi forces, to emphasize security of the population, serving the people, reconciliation (you know, you can't kill or capture your way out of an industrial strength insurgency), living our values, being first with the truth in our strategic communications, and then that final one, which is always learn and adapt.

Another key thought is the encouragement of initiative. You have to create an environment in which leaders at small unit levels, the so-called strategic lieutenants—we call them that because lieutenants carrying out tactical tasks can often have strategic effects—have to be aware of the context within which they're operating so that they can do all that they can do to try to make those positive effects, not just at

the tactical level but at the strategic level as well. And they have to have a sense that they not only can but should exercise initiative within the intent of the big ideas as they filter down to their level, augmented obviously by subordinate leaders adding to those big ideas and ensuring that they're appropriate for the local circumstances in which the small units are operating. These are some of the thoughts, if you will, as we sat down, for example, after the change of command at Central Command and tackled what we thought we needed to do to meet our responsibilities to the subordinate units, to our troopers, and also obviously to our country and to our commander in chief.

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You mentioned the strategic lieutenants, which really is an interesting concept. What are the leadership traits that you look at and you believe are important in identifying the young officers who are showing the attributes that will move them through to senior leadership position?

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Well, I think first of all, there is seriousness about their profession. There is a degree of commitment to truly master the responsibilities of whatever branch or service the individual is in. There is a degree of energy and vision that leaders have to provide. And as people move along, assuming they're fit and they have some qualities to inspire their troopers, over time, I think you start to look at whether they have the added dimensions of brains, judgment, and the ability to communicate. And those, I think, over time, are what start to become more and more important assuming that the individuals have all of the entry-level skills and qualities. In other words, they're physically and mentally tough; they have discipline; they're serious about their job; they're studying their profession; they're trying to master it; and they're meeting their responsibilities to their troopers. And then you're starting to figure out who's the person to whom I turn when I really want some advice from lower levels? Whose judgment do I ride in a really tough spot? Who do I ask to communicate vision, ideas, and so forth to others? You start to get into those qualities, and I think that those are qualities that are developed over time from a host of different perspectives and through different ways.

Obviously, you have your formal military schooling, you have the experience, you have self study, and I'd add another experience that I would call "out of one's intellectual comfort zone" experiences. For me, it's like going to a civilian graduate school after actually being at the Command and General Staff College, where we thought we had very vigorous debates and big differences of opinion. You go to a civilian graduate school, and you find out the differences that we had were about like this in relative terms to the differences that you will find on any civilian campus of reasonable note. And that is a very salutary experience; it is a very challenging experience intellectually. It is a very good experience to have had before you go into cultures and places that are

very different from our own and experience different people. You know, it was very interesting in Iraq in the early days. We'd walk through the streets of Mosul once 101st was up there and the people would come up to us and say, "We love America. We love you. We love democracy." And if you hadn't gone through some of these kinds of experiences, that could throw you for a loop. But if you've had that kind of debate in other circumstances along the way, I think you find that those developmental experiences are of enormous value.

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Now you mentioned the schooling, and I would just like to highlight here that you do have a master's degree in public administration and a Ph.D. from Princeton University's prestigious Woodrow Wilson International Relations School. How did that help prepare you for your current assignment?

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Oh, it was of incalculable value. I went to the Woodrow Wilson School because it had fewer military folks than some of the competition. I figured if I'm going to go out there and throw myself into this challenging position, I might as well go to a place that has all of the qualities and attributes of our very finest institution for this combination inter-disciplinary program of international relations and economics. But it also doesn't have too many military folks, so I'm not going to be able to hide behind my Airborne buddy here or a bunch of military fellows more senior to me. I'm going to have to stand on my own two intellectual feet. And it was an enormously challenging experience, I can tell you; very, very difficult at times, but enormously rewarding as well. I think it did help a great deal. By the way, this is not to say that our military schools are lacking in any sense. We just have to be realistic about the fact that in military schools, when you go to the coffee pot, you're generally going with folks who are in uniform or at least are from the inner agency, and it's a little bit less challenging than if you're going to the coffee pot with the representative of an organization that has a very different view about folks in uniform than do most of us. And I think that prepares you pretty well for some of the spots in which you might find yourself down the road.

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In your environment, as you've discussed, you have a huge collaboration requirement mission—60 nations—and that requires that you be a diplomat. You have to be a statesman at the same time that you're a warfighter leading a very important mission for our national security. Would you describe a little bit about how you have dealt with your responsibilities and how you prepare to operate successfully in a dynamic environment of change where you have to confront complexity every day, and where everything that you think today could possibly change tomorrow? How do you prepare for that?

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Well, first of all, I think you have to be prepared to be com-

mitted to it. This is a nonstop endeavor. It's not an endeavor that recognizes weekends or holidays. The enemy is oblivious to that; world events are oblivious to that. This is a pretty consuming endeavor when you step into it.

Second, you spend an enormous amount of time every day devouring reams of information, intelligence from all different sources, information (in some cases, raw) from every avenue that you can find. And you cultivate, I think, a circle of friends, acquaintances, academic colleagues—you name it—who are going to challenge you on a periodic basis as well, and who don't know you as Gen. Petraeus. They know you as Dave, and they're not intimidated by the four stars on your shoulder because they used to go running with you. So, I think the big issue is just constantly trying to remain on top of the developments, and you can

do that only by devoting enormous amounts of time to constantly monitoring and then actually seeing for yourself and experiencing and talking to those on the ground to get the kind of feel. I feel like the man in the circus who runs around. You know, he gets a plate spinning, and he puts it down and then he goes over gets another one; then he comes back to this one, gives it a couple more spins, and then he gets another—and pretty soon he's got a whole bunch of different plates spinning. I think that's the life of a geographic combatant commander, or many different walks of military life, certainly. But that's certainly the way we feel about what it is that we're trying to do. We're trying to keep a lot of plates spinning to keep the really important ones going at a particularly high rate of speed and not to let the important ones fall on the ground.

Q

The audience that will consume this message consists primarily acquisition workforce members. Do you have any thoughts relative to unique or special leadership attributes that you'd like to see in the acquisition leaders who are coming into theater?

A

Well, I think that they've have to stay current with the situation on the ground. We have a unique circumstance for those who are in uniform in the acquisition community, in some cases, may not have served in a unit actually in a combat environment in a number of years—if ever. So it's hugely important

that once they've raised their hand and said, "I want to go into the acquisition community," that in addition to mastering the very arcane and challenging field that they've chosen, they still remain very much in touch with their roots. And they keep a sense of what it is that is going on out there and stay very close

to those who are actually using what the acquisition community is putting in their hands. And I think the best of those that I've seen over the years are those who are out there on the ground—out there experiencing what our troopers are doing—and who are trying to get their feel for what it is that's needed so that they can translate what may or may not be the clearest of urgent operational needs statements into a piece of equipment or some other element that we're going to purchase.

Q

Gen. Petraeus, we appreciate your sharing your time. Is there anything else that you'd like to say?

A

It's been a privilege to be with you, and I wouldn't have done it if I didn't think it was a very important topic and that the community that will read it is of enormous importance to those who are out there putting it all on the line for our country. And so I want to thank them for what they are doing to—as rapidly as possible—provide what is needed out there as quickly as we identify it to them. Thanks very much.

Q

Sir, on behalf of Dr. Ashton Carter and the entire acquisition workforce, I thank you again for taking the time today as I mentioned, but more importantly, I thank you for your leadership and the sacrifices that you and your family have made. I also would like to thank the soldiers, sailors, airmen, Marines, coastguardsmen, and civilians who have served in your area of operation and have also made great sacrifices for our national security and to ensure that we are successful in this mission that you've taken on.